

Underage Drinking Costs Society More than Illicit Drugs, Study Says

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A new study estimates that underage drinking costs the U.S. \$62 billion a year and results in 3,200 deaths and 2.6 million other "harmful events," *PNN Online* reported June 30. The study conducted by the

Pacific Institute on Research and Education (PIRE)

says that while public and government attention is focused primarily on youth use of illicit drugs, underage drinking is by far the greater problem, killing four times as many youths as all illicit drugs combined.

"The problems caused by underage drinking are a devastating tidal wave of alcohol harm," said lead researcher Ted Miller, Ph.D. "Alcohol-related traffic crashes, violence, teen pregnancies, STDs, burns, drownings, alcohol poisoning, property damage and other risks take a human and economic toll that's much greater than illegal drugs." However, the federal government spends about 25 times more money on preventing illicit-drug use than on underage-drinking prevention.

Miller estimated that every drink consumed by underage youth costs the nation \$3. "That's far more than the 85-cent price tag those drinks carry," he said. "It dwarfs the 10 cents in taxes we collect or the 40 cents in profit the alcohol industry reaps." The report also estimated that underage drinking generates \$18 billion in sales annually for the alcohol industry, and \$2 billion in tax revenues.

The research was published in the July 2006 edition of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*.